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WESTCHESTER COUNTY ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES Y-ZONE, A COMMUNITY BROADBAND PILOT IN YONKERS, AS PART OF *PROJECT OVERCOME*

*An Innovative Internet Access Project in Yonkers, New York's 3rd Largest City,
Fulfilling Community's Urgent Need for WiFi*

White Plains, N.Y. (October 21, 2021) – Today, the [Westchester County Association](#) in partnership with the [City of Yonkers](#), [STEM Alliance](#), [Yonkers Partners in Education \(YPIE\)](#), [Fordham University](#), and [Westhab](#) launched the much-anticipated Yonkers Zone (Y-Zone). This project is made possible through support from [US Ignite](#), the [National Science Foundation \(NSF\)](#) (Award # CNS-2044448), and [Schmidt Futures](#). By utilizing [Citizens Broadband Radio Service \(CBRS\)](#) spectrum, the newly deployed, digital opportunity zone provides free internet access to approximately 250 to 400 need-based households in downtown Yonkers.

"I can speak for our entire team when I say we are thrilled to have successfully launched Y-Zone as part of *Project Overcome*," said Michael N. Romita, President & CEO of the Westchester County Association. "The impact this project will have on the community in Yonkers will be life-changing for so many families who have struggled to have their basic internet needs met throughout their lives and especially this past year amidst the pandemic."

Y-Zone is more than an affordable new connectivity solution, the project is a digital ecosystem that incorporates three core principles. The first is establishing digital equity driven by a coalition of committed local stakeholders, including residents and program youth. Next, the project will aim to achieve widespread adoption through community input and engagement. Lastly, it plans to advance digital fluency by providing device ownership and tech education as well as connectivity.

"Not even one year ago, the Y-zone was something that we had just started to conceptualize as part of a National Science Foundation/US Ignite grant proposal by the WCA and its partners," said Christopher Fisher, Managing Partner, Cuddy & Feder and Digital Committee Chair, Westchester County Association. "It's amazing to see us less than one year later launch CBRS services and implement a plan to introduce digital equity to hundreds of households through an extraordinary array of partners!"

The Westchester County Association was selected as a Project OVERCOME grant recipient in March 2021. The Project OVERCOME grant provided awards to seven communities in a \$2.7 million effort designed to connect the unconnected through novel broadband technology solutions. The U.S. NSF conceived of and provided \$2.25 million in funding for the project, and Schmidt Futures provided an additional \$450,000. US Ignite managed the selection process and continues to oversee these projects

along with multiple efforts to connect the benefits of emerging technology with some of our community's most challenging needs.

"When we launched Project OVERCOME, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew that the projects would offer great insights on innovative connection methods," said Lee Davenport, Director of Community Development at US Ignite. "This CBRS pilot in Yonkers advances an understanding of the intricacies of deploying this novel technology and highlights the strength among a community organization's ability to find collaborative solutions to connect the unconnected."

In order to qualify, residents must live in the service zone which reaches from Glenn Park to Park Hill Avenue, and from downtown Yonkers to Nodine Hill. If you are interested in signing up for Access or Access plus, please contact one of our community partners or email help@yzone.info. Click [HERE](#) to complete the application.

You can access the latest information on Y-Zone at: [YZone.Info](#).

For more information on Project OVERCOME, please visit: www.US-Ignite.org

Partner Quotes:

Mike Spano, Mayor, City of Yonkers, said, "Now more than ever, there is a growing need to bridge the digital divide that exists in communities across the country. I am so proud Yonkers families will be given an equitable solution to technology that supports the education of our students. Many thanks to our Y-Zone partners, led by WCA and US Ignite, for recognizing that affordable connectivity is vital to the success and future of the city."

Bob Cacace, Commissioner of Information Technology, City of Yonkers, said, "Technology in the home has become a vital element to the way Yonkers residents participate in their education, their personal healthcare and to the success in their careers. Mayor Spano recognizes that not all residents have sufficient access to technology and this grant provides funding to help us address this shortcoming for hundreds of residents in the City. In addition, the Y-Zone partnership that has been formed is also focused on finding ways to build on this important step and create a sustainable model that can help equalize access to technology for all Yonkers residents."

Margaret Kaufer, President & CEO, STEM Alliance said, "Internet affordability will always make it impossible for all people to participate in today's digital world. The STEM Alliance is thrilled to be a partner in the Y-Zone which will bring a larger scale, community-based solution to the problem of internet access in Yonkers. For our part, The STEM Alliance is taking this one step further by also bringing devices and tech education to hundreds of Y-Zone users to complete a wraparound solution that truly bridges all sides of the digital divide. While the problem of the digital divide may seem complex, we are excited to prove that right here, in New York's 3rd largest city, we can create innovative solutions to the problem."

Sam Wallis, Executive Director, Yonkers Partners in Education said, "Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE) students have had a unique opportunity through the Y-Zone to contribute to their community and to learn skills that will serve them well as they pursue their college dreams. This past summer, these students began conducting research, surveying the community, and providing recommendations based on their findings. They will also serve as tech teaching assistants to help community members access and use the new technology. We are thrilled that our students are having an impact on addressing the digital divide at a local and national level."

Steve Myrthil, Vice President of Information Technology, Westhab said, "Westhab is thrilled to partner with such a synergistic group of public and private advocates for equity and excellence in hard-hit communities like Nodine Hill. Yonkers is the third most populous city in the state of New York with a population density of almost 12,000 residents per square mile, so this project will have an indelible impact. The Y-Zone broadband project will be a revitalizing force in Yonkers, and success here will set the stage for the expansion of programs that address the digital divide."

"This is a fabulous opportunity," remarked **Dr. Jane Bolgatz, Associate Professor, Fordham Graduate School of Education**. "Fordham is supporting the project by researching how getting free WiFi helps people improve their experiences with education, employment, and healthcare. We are also working with the terrific high schoolers at YPIE, who are so creatively figuring out ways to tackle the problem of the digital divide."

Supporter Quotes:

"We need to make sure that the people of Yonkers have all of the tools needed to close the digital divide. I've long fought for the federal funding needed to provide Yonkers residents with equitable access to reliable broadband services and am proud that this critical funding through the National Science Foundation will give up to 400 families free internet access through project Y-Zone," said **U.S. Senator of New York Chuck Schumer**. "I am proud to work with the Westchester County Association to continue this important work of making sure that the Yonkers community has access to the reliable, high-speed internet that's needed in our modern-day economy."

"Crown Castle is proud to be able to provide the fiber for this innovative and important project, building the backbone that will enable Y-Zone households to finally get the internet access necessary to fully participate in our increasingly virtual society," said **Curt Fox, Director of Fiber Sales at Crown Castle**. "We know that there are three key elements to closing the digital divide: Infrastructure, accessibility, and affordability. The Y-Zone project addresses all of these and more, providing support and education to ensure that downtown Yonkers residents will be able to maximize this unique opportunity."

About Westchester County Association

The [Westchester County Association](http://www.westchester.org) is the most influential group of businesses and nonprofits in Westchester County and the surrounding region. The WCA is committed to smart growth, economic vitality, and presenting a strong independent voice on behalf of the professional community. Its key objectives are economic growth, business development, and policy advocacy on behalf of its members. For more information about the Westchester County Association, visit www.westchester.org.

About US Ignite

US Ignite is a high-tech nonprofit with a mission to accelerate the smart community movement. Our public-private partnership programs leverage advanced networking and data science to drive key outcomes for communities. Our work also enables new opportunities for wireless and IoT research designed to help narrow the gap between cutting-edge experimentation and scalable, real-world technology deployments. For more information, visit www.us-ignite.org.

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